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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 006293

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DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2010

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SUBJECT: CHARGE'S MEETING WITH HOME MINISTER

Classified By: RLA N.Langston, reasons para 1.4 b, d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Home Affairs Minister Babar told Charge that RAB is now the lead law enforcement agency on combating the JMB terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism. He also said JMB is aware that their string of violent attacks is not sanctioned by Islam, and therefore their prime motivation must be to unseat the ruling party by splintering their four-party coalition. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 19, Charge and RLA met with Home Affairs Minister Lutfuzzaman Babar for one hour in his office. Home Secretary Hossain was also present.

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¶3. (C) Babar told Charge that the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a paramilitary group responsible for 148 extra-judicial "cross-fire" killings in 2005, is now the lead law enforcement agency in the counter-terrorism campaign against the Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB). He stated that the country's intelligence agencies remain involved, but that RAB is the only agency authorized to conduct both intelligence and operational activities. Therefore, Babar said he designated RAB to be in charge of arrests and press releases on the JMB round-up as well as any other counter-terrorism activities. (Note: Senior police officials have told RSO that they are angry that RAB is getting all the credit for investigative work done by police.)

¶4. (C) Babar said the campaign against JMB extremists is ongoing and that despite "good catches" in recent weeks, the fight continues, especially given that Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman are still at large. He said that three of the seven JMB council members have been arrested and that a total of 700 people are in custody in connection with the JMB terrorist attacks. He stated that 200-300 have been released. Charge requested a copy of statements by the high-profile JMB arrestees and/or copies of transcripts of interrogations, which Babar promised to provide.

¶5. (C) BDG efforts, however, are not without their snafus. Babar confirmed that one of those arrested and released was Kazarul, Bangla Bhai's reputed deputy. Babar said he was in Singapore when this happened and found out that a young official in charge in that district had done a background check with all the police offices and found no records on Kazarul and therefore released him. (Note: PMO Principal Secretary Siddiqui told Charge the release resulted from a

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phone call by PM son Tarique Rahman.) Another incident which made Babar "furious" was the authorization by a high official to re-instate the bank account of the Kuwait-based NGO, Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, which had been frozen in 2004 because of its support for extremist Ahle Hadith mosques. The re-instatement reportedly stemmed from an appeal from a high-level official who argued on behalf of an orphanage funded by RIHS. Babar refused to give the name of the official but said that the account was now frozen once more.

¶6. (C) Babar assured Charge that no BDG official "would be spared" if they had dealings with JMB. He admitted that at one time, when Bangla Bhai was allegedly popular in the Rajshahi division for his vigilante action against local criminals, several government ministers supported him. When Charge asked if those ministers were being held accountable, he sighed, "This is a difficult question you are asking me."

¶7. (C) Babar insisted that JMB's agenda is political and not religious. JMB must be aware that Islam does not condone violence, he said, and the randomness of their targets indicates they are primarily interested in creating instability. Therefore, he concluded, JMB is politically motivated, and it's all about "winning the next election" and splitting Jamaat Islami (JI) from the BNP-led ruling

coalition.

¶8. (C) Charge told Babar that DS would like to offer Bangladesh extensive training through its Anti-Terrorism Training Assistance (ATA) program, which would include sending a DS agent to be assigned to a police office, preferably the Detective Branch. Babar said the program sounded good but he would get back to Charge, who noted we need an answer by December 30.

¶9. (C) Charge noted that the Department had decided not to support USG meetings for a RAB delegation due to visit Washington because of our well-known concerns about RAB's systematic extra-judicial killings. Babar asserted that he was unaware of the visit, but remarked, "If your government will not help with RAB, we will do the training ourselves."

¶10. (C) Comment: We need to confirm with DGFII, NSI, and the PMO that RAB is indeed the BDG's designated new lead on counter-terrorism and the anti-JMB campaign. Officially or not, RAB seems to be playing that role, based on its high-profile JMB arrests and weapons seizures. RAB could well be abolished if the Awami League manages to win the next election, but if the USG-BDG CT partnership is to become more robust in the short term, it seems we need to decide what we can and cannot do with RAB as a matter of law and policy.  
CHAMMAS